

Replacement Worker Costs



OTTAWA-CARLETON
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD



THE ISSUE

School boards are facing a serious funding gap to cover the replacement costs when staff are on sick leave. This funding gap directly affects student learning.

When a school-based employee is on sick leave, a replacement worker is needed.

In 2022-2023, the OCDSB received \$15 million in provincial funding to cover these costs. Sick leave usage rates are rising steadily and the actual expense was \$35.8 million. This leaves a gap of more than \$20 million. This money has to be found elsewhere in the budget, which can have an adverse impact on student learning

This structural problem is rooted in provincial legislation and underfunding. In 2012, legislation was introduced that significantly changed the design of sick leave plans for all school board employees. Since the province negotiated these new plans, the funding for replacement worker costs has not matched the need.

\$20^M

The provincial funding shortfall OCDSB had to cover by reducing program expenditures in other areas in 2022-2023. This cost is expected to increase.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Sick leave provisions are provincially established and increased cost pressures are, for the most part, outside of school boards' control.

- 1 Increase Funding:** We urge the government to fully fund the cost of public education, recognizing that the increased use of sick leave reflects the complex pressures on educators and educational support workers in a system that is underfunded relative to the needs of its learners.
- 2 Review Approach to Sick Leave and Well-being:** Reevaluate the current sick leave plan, introduced in 2012, to consider whether the structure of the plan contributes in any way to the rise in sick leave usage due to availability of 120 to 131 sick days per year. Explore structural changes that balance employee wellness and financial sustainability.



MORE INFORMATION

Supporting employee wellness is core to the OCDSB's commitment to employee well-being and engagement. Employees experiencing an illness that impedes their ability to perform the duties of their job adequately, should be able to access their sick leave entitlements.

The current sick leave plan for Ontario school boards provides permanent employees with 11 days of sick leave at 100% pay and up to 120 days short term disability at 90% salary. The 120 days are accessible for incidental sick leave in the same way as the first 11 days, and are not limited to longer term or chronic illnesses, as is often the case with such plans. If an employee has not used all 11 days of sick leave during the previous school year, these days can be carried over to top up short term disability payments to 100% of pay. Unlike most short term disability plans in the public sector, which pay 75% after the elimination period, this plan provides school board employees with a pool of 131 days which can be used for incidental (time to time) absences each year.

A recent study of select Ontario school districts shows that participating school districts experienced an average of 14.95 sick days per employee for the 2022-2023 school year. The OCDSB average sick leave usage is lower than the provincial average, but has shown an upward trend in usage. For example, average sick leave usage increased from 11.21 days in 2018-2019 to 13.31 days in 2022-2023.

If we look at this trend over time, replacement costs for OCDSB employees accessing sick leave have climbed from \$18.4 million in 2017-2018 to over \$35.8 million in 2022-2023. While the pandemic has had an impact, early indications show that this trend could increase by an additional 9% this year over last year.

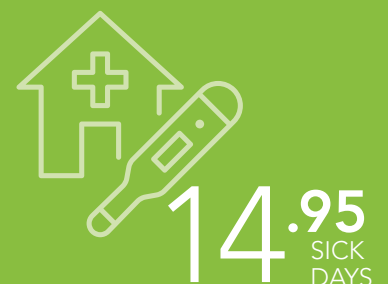
Chronic underfunding of this cost requires an ongoing reallocation of resources and limitations on supports, which not only affects student learning, it adversely impacts employee morale and wellness.



Replacement costs for employees accessing sick leave have climbed dramatically.



Sick leave usage has increased since before the pandemic.



Average number of sick days per employee in Ontario school boards in 2022-2023.